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RE: SOURCES

THE AMERICAN SHOW PRINTER: CURTISS SHOW PRINT AND HATCH SHOW PRINT

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The history of American popular entertainment is documented in many different ways, ranging from materials such as correspondence, diaries, scrap-books, company records, oral-history interviews, and autobiographies that directly tell the story of performers, business managers, and behind-the-scenes crew, to material created by others and used for the promotion of the artists. In this second category fall the subjects of this article, two letterpress¹ show printers, Curtiss Show Print of Continental, Ohio, and Hatch Show Print of Nashville, Tennessee. There were many show printers across the country from the late nineteenth through the twentieth centuries, but the majority of these companies have closed, and their type and printing blocks have been discarded or dispersed.² Although other printers altered their operations because of changes in technology that allow work to be done in less laborious ways, Curtiss Show Print and Hatch Show Print are still working and using the old equipment and techniques. Both Nyle Staler, owner of Curtiss Show Print, and Jim Sherraden, manager of Hatch Show Print, realize the historical and research value of their show-print materials, and both have taken steps to save those materials, forging institutional relationships that are commitments for the preservation of their show-print work.

Whether playing in local opera houses, in their own tents, or on showboats, companies touring the United States through the nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries brought entertainment and education to their audiences. In the period from the 1920s to the early 1950s, the two companies were most active in providing printing for their entertainment clients, who included repertoire companies, vaudeville companies, tent shows, minstrel shows, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* companies, revues, magicians, circuses, showboats, country music and bluegrass performers, and others (Fig. 1). Advance men would precede these touring companies by some days, seeing to the posting of paper, as the show-print products were called, and the distribution of handbills. As William Lawrence Slout notes, tent shows did not have the luxury of waiting for attendance to increase during a run: "They needed large houses from the opening night."³ The paper posted and handed out was the primary method of advertising, and touring companies used a lot of it. In fact, as Will T. Hatch noted in 1939, "The tent shows which formerly played 'week stands' are now 'one-nighters.' They use more paper for one day than they previously did in one week. . . ."⁴ These touring companies took the printing work of Curtiss Show Print and Hatch Show Print around the country, and that printing provides a valuable visual resource for what entertained America.

Bill Curtiss founded his letterpress printing company in 1905 in Kalida, Ohio, but soon after moved it a few miles away to Continental, into a building only a few hundred feet from the railroad, which was a critical element in the success of Curtiss Show Print. Curtiss prided himself on turning orders around very quickly, and he gained a reputation among his show-business clients for fast and excellent work. On Bill's death in 1929, his son Carl took over the business. Curtiss service continued to be good. On occasion, orders would be received and sent out on the same day, shipped out by rail, bus, or sometimes personally delivered by car.⁵ Carl instilled a solid work ethic in his employees, one of whom was Nyle Stateler. Stateler came to Curtiss Show Print directly from high school in 1941, and felt at home from the moment he walked into the shop. Over time he learned to do everything in the shop, including running the linotype machine then used to set the weekly newspaper, *The Continental News-Review*. The majority of Curtiss's show printing was done between 1905 and World War II, but Stateler worked with, and remembers, companies that continued to tour and perform into the 1950s. On his death in 1956, Carl Curtiss left Curtiss Show Print to his three employees at the time. Eventually, Stateler bought out the other two to become the sole owner and operator of Curtiss Show Print, which he and his wife, Helen, continue to run.

In 2005, a half-hour documentary on Curtiss Show Print, *Continental, Ohio*, was produced by WOSU and Murphy & Associates. Producer Tom Murphy and Tom Rieland, general manager of WOSU, recognized the research value of the Curtiss printing blocks and paper, and introduced the curator of the Ohio State University's Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute to Nyle Stateler. In 2006, Stateler made a donation of the company's show print materials, including printing blocks, artwork and photographs, correspondence, job tickets, ledgers, posters, window cards, heralds, tickets, letterhead stationery, and other paper. These materials document not only the work of the show printer but also that of the many touring companies for whom Curtiss printed.

Hatch Show Print was founded in 1879 in Nashville as C. R. & H. H. Hatch, Printers. Although show printing quickly became an important part of Hatch's business, the company also did other nonshow work, as did Curtiss. Nevertheless, show printing was the principal activity.



Figure 1. Poster by Curtiss Show Print for Mullen's Musical Maids. Courtesy the Curtiss Show Print collection at the Ohio State University.

It appears that as early as 1920 the company was calling itself Hatch Show Print, although a longtime employee who started work in 1934 claimed to have changed the name from C. R. & H. H. Hatch.⁶ In 1921, William (Will) T. Hatch, Charles's son, took over management of the shop. Even though he was relatively young, Will had worked in all phases of the business from the time he was a young boy. As Hatch said in a 1939 article, "Up until very recently, I did most all of my own poster designing, making all drawings in reverse direct on the poster boards. Years before Dad's death, I did most of the carving for the posters produced in the shop."⁷ With a single

principal artist and carver, it is not surprising, therefore, that Hatch posters of the period had a very consistent look that was strong, clean, eye-catching. The authors of *Hatch Show Print* provide this description of Will T. Hatch: "A determined businessman and demanding manager, he was also a gifted carver of woodblocks. His handiwork reveals an obvious passion for creating bold, colorful posters encompassing the entire spectrum of southern entertainment—from sports, vaudeville, and minstrel shows to circuses, carnivals, movies, and country music."⁸

Following the death of Will T. Hatch in 1952, his family continued to run the business with the assistance of longtime employees. Because the demands of their clientele were changing, Hatch made changes in technology to meet increased needs for speed, moving away from woodblocks and increasingly using metal photoplates. In 1964, Allene Hatch, widow of Will Hatch, sold the print shop to Lucky Moeller and Bill Denny, and changing ownership became a way of life for a number of years. After several interim owners, Bill Denny repurchased the business in 1981. With the hard work of Paul Ritscher, and later, that of Jim Sherraden, Hatch Show Print began to reclaim its place in show printing. In 1986, Denny sold Hatch to Opryland USA Inc., which, with the Grand Ole Opry, was owned by Gaylord Entertainment Company. In 1992, following an extended relationship with the Country Music Foundation, the Gaylord company donated Hatch Show Print to the foundation, thereby making it possible to preserve the remarkable letterpress company under the umbrella of the Country Music Hall of Fame® and Museum. Under the direction of manager Jim Sherraden, Hatch Show Print makes restrikes from the old hand-carved blocks, creates new graphic art by combining old blocks and type for collaged monoprints, and does new show-print work for a variety of clients.

A complete list of show-business clients for the two show printers is beyond the scope of this article, but they are numerous. For many of the touring companies and performers, the material contained in the Curtiss Show Print and Hatch Show Print collections is likely to be the primary documentation of their existence. For others, the collections are a rich resource supplementing other documentation. Of particular interest are the minstrel-show clients of the two show printers, including African American minstrel shows. In discussing the role of African Americans in American circus history, LaVahn G. Hoh and William H. Rough note that "It is still difficult to find reliable information about black participation in circus history, although it certainly existed. 'Shufflin' Sam from Alabam' was a copy of the Silas Green Show. . . ."⁹ A portion of that information can be found in the records and physical materials of Curtiss's print work for Shufflin' Sam from Alabam' and in Hatch's work for Silas Green from New Orleans.

One of the companies for whom Curtiss printed over decades was the Kinsey Komedie Kompany (Fig. 2), along with the popular Madge Kinsey Players, and short-lived offsprings, the Kathryn Kinsey Players and the Beth Kinsey Kompany. In operation from 1881, the company had made it into its fourth generation of family performers when it closed in 1951.¹⁰ Prior to the founding of Curtiss Show Print, the Kinsey Komedie Kompany was known to have used promotional materials printed by Brown and Wiant,¹¹ publishers of the St. Paris, Ohio, *News-Dispatch* and well-equipped to do job printing.¹² It is not clear at what point Curtiss Show Print became the primary printer for the Kinseys; however, a significant number of posters, printing blocks, and business materials are extant in the collection for the company with its various names.

Another Curtiss client was the well-known Bryant's Showboat, owned and operated by Captain Billy Bryant. The showboat traveled the Ohio, Allegheny, Monongahela, Kanawha, Mississippi, and Illinois Rivers for almost forty years, until 1942. Like Kinsey, Bryant's Showboat featured multiple generations of the Bryant family. Third-generation performer Betty

Bryant described how the billposter or advance man put work printed by show printers into use: "This man was sent out at the beginning of the season with a few dollars in his pocket, a book of passes, and all the paper (posters, tack cards, and 'three sheets') he could carry.... With that [a bucket of paste made from flour and water], he would post bills on barns, trees, fences, or any available surface."¹³ For Bryant's Showboat, Curtiss printed the range of paper described by Betty Bryant, as well as tickets and letterhead stationery featuring photographs of the showboat (Fig. 3).

Other long-time clients included the Harry Shannon Players, the magician Mysterious Brown (Fig. 4), the Frank Ginnivan and Norma Ginnivan Dramatic companies, Madam Thelma, The Skating Macks, Arthur Hauk's Sunshine Revue, Skippy LaMore's Comedians, many minstrel shows such as Shufflin' Sam from Alabam' and J. C. Lincoln's Mighty Minstrels,¹⁴ and circuses, including the Beers-Barnes Circus (Fig. 5).

The first printing job done by Charles R. and Herbert H. Hatch was a poster for a lecture by the Reverend Henry Ward Beecher on the "Reign of the Common People." Hatch provided regular orders for the Keith-Albee-Orpheum chain for the many vaudeville shows in its theatres, and also movie posters to theatres regionally. Two minstrel shows that were significant Hatch clients were Silas Green from New Orleans (Fig. 6) and the Rabbit Foot Minstrels, both African American companies.¹⁵ The Bijou chain of movie theatres was also a big account, along with other theatres both local and distant. And of course, as the Grand Ole Opry grew, the needs of individual performers for posters to promote their touring also grew, and Hatch Show Print filled those needs, providing posters for country music performers such as Eddy Arnold, Roy Acuff, Hank Williams, Dolly Parton, Charley Pride, Johnny Cash, and Bill Monroe, who remained a Hatch client for many years. But country and bluegrass performers were not the only musicians who utilized Hatch's services over the years: others include Bessie Smith, Elvis Presley, B. B. King, Bob Dylan, and Bruce Springsteen.

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Figure 2. Poster by Curtiss Show Print for the Kinsey Komedy Kompany. Courtesy the Curtiss Show Print collection at the Ohio State University.

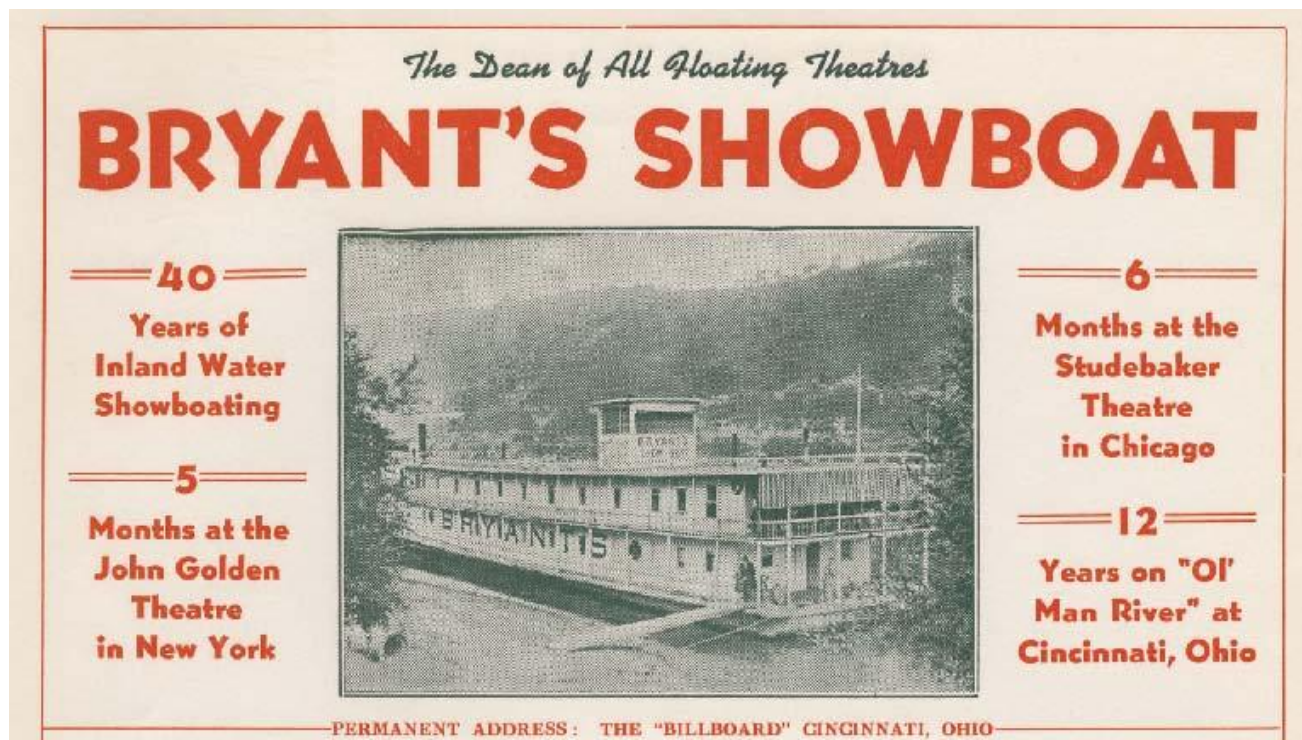


Figure 3. Letterhead stationery by Curtiss Show Print for Bryant's Showboat. Courtesy the Curtiss Show Print collection at the OhioState University.



Figure 4.Poster by Curtiss Show Print for Harlie *[sic]* McCarthy, a ventriloquist act with the magician Mysterious Brown. Courtesy the Curtiss Show Print collection at the Ohio State University.

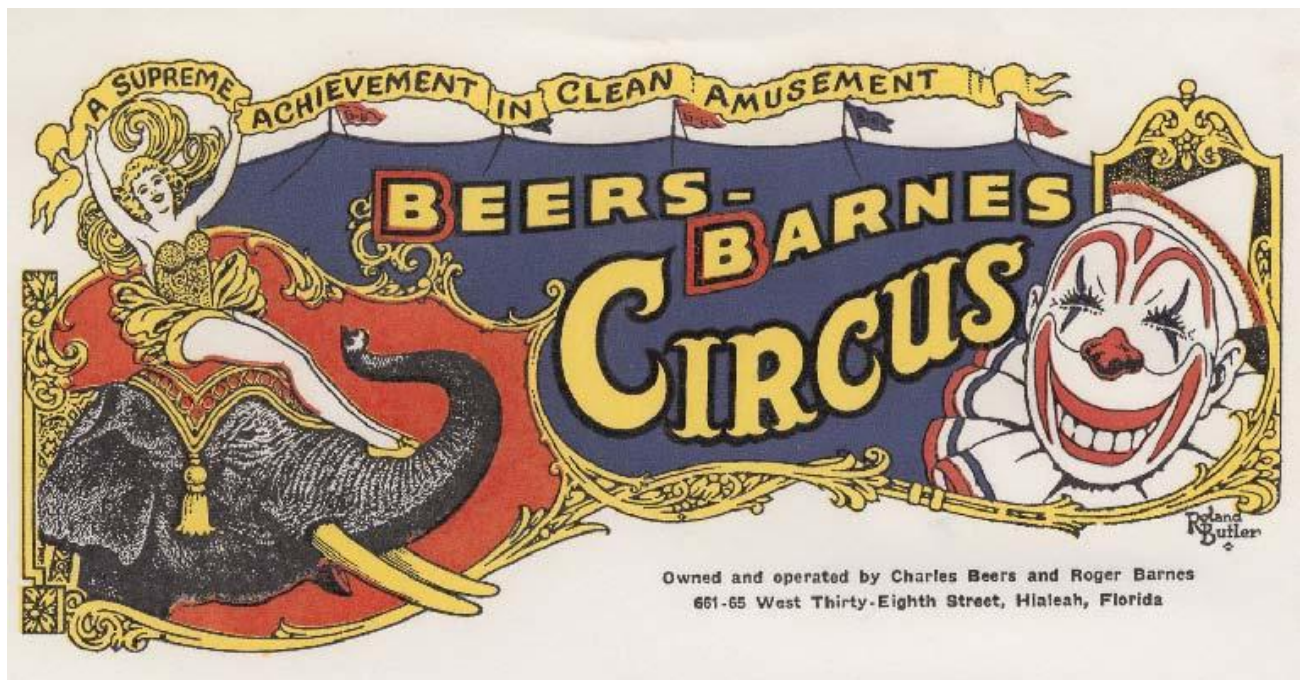


Figure 5. Detail from letterhead stationery by Curtiss Show Print for Beers-Barnes Circus. Courtesy the Curtiss Show Print collection at the Ohio State University.



Figure 6. Poster by Hatch Show Print advertising the Silas Green from New Orleans minstrel show. Courtesy of Hatch Show Print.

The Curtiss collection contains more than 1,200 printing blocks, ranging in size from under two inches square, for blocks that would be used in combination with others, to large single blocks for the entire printed piece. Printed materials include posters in several sizes, letterhead stationery, tickets, postcards, and other promotional materials.¹⁶ There are records that, though not complete for the history of the company, provide valuable information about Curtiss and the show-print business (Fig. 7) as well as about the performers for whom Curtiss printed—for instance, not only the orders made by various companies but also their itineraries and repertoire. The job ticket envelopes frequently contained poster information and designs sketched by the performer, photographs, artwork or ideas for artwork, and correspondence

placing the order and, on occasion, telling Curtiss how business is. One such letter from Harry Shannon of the Harry Shannon Players ordering seventy-five dated cards provides interesting information about competition among various kinds of shows: "Where the name of town is usually run. Make it blank instead of here. I will fill it in. The Carnivals are raising h— with us. Can't finda [*sic*] spot to land in."¹⁷

Hatch Show Print is an older and much larger business than Curtiss Show Print, with more clients over its years of operation. The historic materials documenting that history are extensive. When the company moved in 1992, the 56-ft.-long, 16-ft.-tall shelving that had been built out of old Hatch woodblocks to hold the woodblocks and wood type was moved.¹⁸ Those "shelves and cabinets are filled with as many as 10,000 basswood and maple wood blocks, thousands of photo plates, and countless drawers of wood and metal type."¹⁹ Also included in the archival collection are original printed materials and business records, including account records.

The Curtiss Show Print and Hatch Show Print collections are administered in very different ways, but with a common concern for the preservation of the materials. With the exception of the presses and wood type, all of the Curtiss Show Print historic show-print materials, including blocks, original printed materials, artwork, and show-print client business records, have been donated to the Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute for preservation and so that they can be made available for research and teaching. One of the special collections of the Ohio State University Libraries, the Lawrence and Lee Institute collects, preserves, maintains, and makes accessible research materials pertaining to performing arts. Since that donation, Curtiss Show Print's operations have been separate from the archival collection. Also a part of the OSU Libraries, the Book Arts Division is an integral part of the program developed for the Curtiss Show Print collection. The Lawrence and Lee Institute and the Books Arts Division are working collaboratively to make record prints of all the Curtiss printing blocks, to make digital surrogates of collection materials, and to allocate certain blocks for continued use for teaching purposes.

Hatch Show Print has taken a different route to preservation and access. Now a division of the Country Music Hall of Fame® and Museum, Hatch serves as a working museum, using its historic woodblocks and wood type to make restrikes of old posters as well as to create new art. Manager Jim Sherraden calls the work of Hatch "preservation through production."²⁰ In 2006, Jason Felton developed a set of documents for Hatch that serve as the plan to move forward with the archival work needed.²¹ There is space for the Hatch Archives at Hatch Show Print; however, dedicated staffing and resources are not yet available. The ongoing operation of Hatch Show Print, use of the historic woodblocks and type in making restrikes and creating new art, the training of interns in the old methods, and numerous workshops around the country constitute a preservation effort not only for the physical historical materials, but also for the letterpress tradition and work of the show printer.



Figure 7. Advertising card for Curtiss Show Print: miniature version of a Curtiss poster for the film *Grand Hotel* at the Faurot Theatre in Lima, Ohio. Courtesy the Curtiss Show Print collection at the Ohio State University.

The Curtiss Show Print and Hatch Show Print collections are remarkable resources for the study of late nineteenth- through twentieth-century American popular entertainment, with great strengths in minstrel shows, circuses, vaudeville, repertoire companies, tent shows, showboats, and country and bluegrass music. Both collections are open for research, and scholars are encouraged to take advantage of the opportunity provided by these historic materials.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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614-292-6614, couch.l@osu.edu
library.osu.edu/sites/tri/exhibits/Curtiss.php

Hatch Show Print
316 Broadway, Nashville, TN 37201-2006
615-256-2805, hatchshowprint@bellsouth.net
www.countrymusicHalloffame.com/site/experience-hatch.aspx

ENDNOTES

1. Letterpress printing is a process of printing from a raised, inked surface. Lithography was also used for posters, and examples can be found in various arts and performing arts collections. For example, the Cincinnati Art Museum holds the Strobridge Litho. Co. collection, an outstanding example of lithographed circus posters.
2. For instance, much of the artwork for Central Show Printing Company of Mason City, Iowa, is held by a private collector. In the case of Southern Poster, the great Atlanta, Georgia, letterpress company of the mid-twentieth century, the shop was bought out by Yee-Haw Industries, which uses the old type and blocks to create new art. However, others such as Tribune ShowPrint, in operation since 1878, are still in existence. This small, family-owned business continues to use their old presses and type, and has collaborated with Purdue University on letterpress projects.
3. William Lawrence Slout, *Theatre in a Tent: The Development of a Provincial Entertainment* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1972), 104.
4. Will T. Hatch, "Sixty Years of Show Posters!" *The Inland Printer* (October 1939): 27-28, at 28.
5. Nyle Stateler, telephone interview by author, 18 May 2007. Stateler recalled delivering Beers-Barnes posters to southern Ohio and making other deliveries to show-print clients in the region.
6. Jim Sherraden, Elek Horvath, and Paul Kingsbury, *Hatch Show Print: The History of a Great American Poster Shop* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2001), 20-3.
7. Hatch, 27.
8. Sherraden et al., 27.
9. LaVahn G. Hoh and William H. Rough, *Step Right Up: The Adventures of Circus in America* (White Hall, Virginia: Betterway Publications, Inc., 1990), 69.
10. Charles Harris Bell III, "An Ohio Repertoire-Tent Show Family: The Kinsey Comedy Company and the Madge Kinsey Players, 1881-1951" (Ph.D. diss., Bowling Green State University, 1978), 35.
11. Ibid., 43.
12. Judge Evan P. Middleton, *History of Champaign County, Ohio: Its People, Industries and Institutions* (Indianapolis: B.F. Bowen & Co., Inc., 1917), II: 58-60.
13. Betty Bryant, *Here Comes the Showboat!* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 72-3.
14. A Curtiss poster for J. C. Lincoln's Mighty Minstrels can be seen in Walker Evans's photograph, "Show Poster in Alabama Town," January 1936. This photograph is part of the Farm Security Administration-Office of War Information Photograph Collection held by the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. [hereafter, FSA/OWI]. Available online through the American Memory Project: memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html (accessed 19 May 2007).
15. Sherraden et al., 38-47.
16. A Hatch poster for Silas Green from New Orleans can be seen in several of Marion Post Wolcott's photograph entitled "Some of the Negroes watching itinerant salesman selling goods from his truck in center of town. On Saturday afternoon. Belzoni, Mississippi Delta, Mississippi" and "Itinerant salesman selling goods from his truck to Negroes in center of town on Saturday afternoon. Belzoni, Mississippi Delta, Mississippi." October

1939. These photographs are part of the Farm Security Administration-Office of War Information Photograph Collection held by the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC. Available online through the American Memory Project: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html> (accessed 19 May 2007).

17. Harry Shannon, letter to Bill Curtiss, 13 May 1936.

18. Sherraden et al.. 127.

19. "Hatch Today," Country Music Hall of Fame® and Museum, www.countrymusichalloffame.com/site/eKpeience-h-dlch-today/dspx (accessed 25 May 2007).

20. Beverly Burmeier, "Poster Child: A Nashville Company Keeps Its Letterpress Going." Preservation Online, www.nationaltrust.org/Magazine/archives/arch_story/051107.htm (accessed 11 May 2007).

21. Jason Felton, "Hatch Show Print: Archival Action Plan," "Hatch Show Print: Archival Policy," "Hatch Show Print: General Catalog Guidelines," and "Hatch Show Print: Digital Archive" (internal reports), 1 September 2006.